



Haiti

International Religious Freedom Report 2007

Released by the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respected this right in practice.

There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Government during the period covered by this report, and government policy continued to contribute to the generally free practice of religion.

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious belief or practice.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

Section I. Religious Demography

The country, which shares the Caribbean island of Hispaniola with the Dominican Republic, has an area of 10,714 square miles and a population of 8.4 million.

A U.N. Population Fund census released in May 2006 (based on 2003 data) revealed the following religious demographics: 54.7 percent of the population is Roman Catholic, 15.4 percent Baptist, 7.9 percent Pentecostal, 3 percent Adventist, 2.1 percent voodoo (vodun), 1.5 percent Methodist, 0.7 percent Episcopalian, 0.5 percent Jehovah's Witnesses, 0.07 percent Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), 0.02 percent Muslim, and 0.4 percent other religious affiliation; 10.2 percent reported they followed no religion. Census data did not account for the remaining 3.51 percent of the population.

The figure for voodoo represented only those who selected voodoo as their primary religion. A much larger segment of the population practices voodoo alongside Christianity (most commonly with Catholicism) and considers Christianity their primary religion. While the Government officially recognized voodoo as a religion in 2003, it continues to be frowned upon by the elite, conservative Catholics, and Protestants. The Government provides no legal status for voodoo except for its recognition as a legitimate religious practice.

Section II. Status of Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, provided that practices do not disturb law and order, and the Government generally respected this right in practice. The Government at all levels sought to protect this right in full and did not tolerate its abuse, either by governmental or private actors.

The Constitution directs the establishment of laws to regulate the recognition and operation of religious groups. The administration and monitoring of religious affairs falls under the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Cults. The Bureau of Religious Affairs within the Ministry is responsible for registering churches, clergy, and missionaries.

The following holy days are observed officially as national holidays: Good Friday, Corpus Christi, All Saints' Day, All Souls' Day, and Christmas.

Recognition by the Bureau of Religious Affairs affords religious groups standing in legal disputes, protects churches' tax-exempt status, and extends civil recognition to church documents such as marriage and baptismal certificates.

Requirements for registration with the Bureau include information on qualifications of the group's leader, a membership list, and a list of the group's social projects. Registered religious groups must submit an annual report of their activities to the Bureau. Most Catholic and Protestant organizations were registered. Many nondenominational Christian groups and voodoo practitioners have not sought official status; however, there were no reports of any instance in which this requirement hampered the operation of a religious group. According to the Government, many groups-Christian and voodoo-do not seek official recognition simply because they operate informally.

Goods brought into the country for use by registered religious groups and missionaries are exempt from customs duties, and registered churches are not taxed. Some religious organizations complained that customs officials sometimes refused to honor their tax-exempt status; however, it appeared that these refusals generally were attempts by corrupt officials to extort bribes rather than to limit religious practices.

Historically Roman Catholicism was the official religion. While this official status ended with the enactment of the 1987 Constitution, neither the Government nor the Holy See has renounced the 1860 concordat, which continues to serve as the basis for relations between the Catholic Church (and its religious orders) and the state. In many respects, Catholicism retains its traditional primacy among the country's religious groups. Official and quasi-official functions are held in Catholic churches and cathedrals, such as "Te Deum" Masses for Independence Day, Flag Day, and Founders Day. However, in the past several years the Government has recognized the increasing role of Protestant churches. For example, Episcopal and other Protestant clergy and voodoo practitioners have been invited to participate when the religious sector is asked to play an advisory role in politics.

Organized missionary groups and missionaries affiliated with independent churches were present and operated hospitals, orphanages, schools, and clinics.

Foreign missionaries enter on regular tourist visas and submit paperwork similar to that submitted by domestic religious groups to register with the Bureau of Religious Affairs. While some missionaries were concerned by the slowness of the Government in issuing residence permits, there was no indication that the delay was due to obstructionism.

The Constitution stipulates that persons cannot be required to join an organization or receive religious instruction contrary to their convictions. Therefore, in Catholic or Protestant parochial schools, the school authorities prohibit proselytization on behalf of the church with which they are affiliated.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Government policy and practice contributed to the generally free practice of religion.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees in the country.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had been abducted or illegally removed from the United States, or of the refusal to allow such citizens to be returned to the United States.

Section III. Societal Abuses and Discrimination

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious belief or practice.

Religion plays a prominent role in society. Many citizens display a keen interest in religious matters and freely express their religious beliefs.

Ecumenical organizations existed. Interfaith cooperation was perhaps most effective in the National Federation of Private Schools.

While society generally was tolerant of the variety of religious practices, Christian attitudes toward voodoo ranged from acceptance as part of the culture to rejection as incompatible with Christianity. In the past these differing perspectives led to isolated instances of conflict. The Bureau of Religious Affairs effectively managed periodic tension between some Protestant and voodoo groups, in some cases sending representatives to assist local authorities.

Some Protestant and Catholic clergy were politically active. One Protestant pastor led the Christian Movement for a New

Haiti political party, and another led the National Union of Christians for the Renovation of Haiti political party. The Conference of Catholic Bishops and the Protestant Federation occasionally issued statements on political matters.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. U.S. embassy representatives routinely met with religious and civil society leaders to seek their views of the political process.

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